

Coconut Harvest IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

Submitted by Charlie Beck

As Hurricane Mathew approached with its 140 mph winds, I decided to remove all of the coconuts from the palm beside our home. I used a pole pruner to cut each infructescence and brought down whole clusters with each cut. They were quite heavy- heavier than I thought they'd be. Note for the future: don't plant crushable plant material under coconut trees! Lucky for me, the *Zamia floridana* withstood the pounding.

I did have experience harvesting coconuts but I usually brought down one fruit at a time. Over the years I have developed a plan to drain coconut water and access the coconut flesh (endosperm). I'll share my method with you, so that you might have a starting point to develop a plan that works best for you.

Any freshly harvested coconut, mature or immature, contains delicious coconut water. As you can guess, fresh coconut water tastes much better than store purchased products. Store bought coconut water must be processed to provide a long shelf life. Freshly harvested coconut water stays fresh in the refrigerator for only a few days. Water stays fresh in the coconut for a much longer period, so harvest only what you can use in a few days. Coconut water is my favorite, refreshing drink. It's also excellent in homemade smoothies. I only wish that fresh coconut water could magically appear without having to actually do the draining.

Suggested Method and Equipment:

I have found that a wood boring, auger drill bit is best to use for coconut drilling. Standard twist drills work, but they don't cut as fast as auger bits. Any size will work, but I use 3/8-1/2" bits.

I use a 36 ounce clear measuring cup to collect the coconut water. This provides a stable base and is perfectly sized to match a 6" strainer. The cup should be clear so you can tell when the draining is complete. If the cup or bowl is larger than the strainer, husk fibers can bypass the strainer and fall into the water.

I use a 6" diameter fine mesh strainer to filter the water. Standard mesh strainers let too many shavings into the coconut water. I've also used coffee filters in the past, but that is very time consuming process. You can find a fine mesh strainer for under \$10 at your local box store.

I usually drill the drain hole on the convex side of the coconut. That side fits nicely into the strainer. I drill the second vent hole into the opposite, flat side. Sometimes the drain hole clogs, so just add a second drain hole.

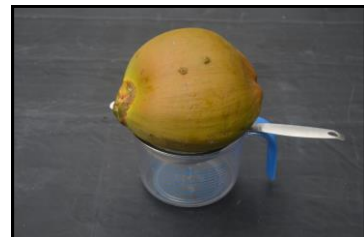
Once the water is drained, you might want to harvest the coconut flesh inside the husk. I use a one sided hatchet and a small sledge hammer to cut through the coconut husk. One or two strikes on the first side and a single strike on the opposite side is all you need to make the split. I place a scrap piece of 4x4 below the coconut, so not to damage anything below the hatchet cutting edge. I do not recommend splitting a coconut with a long handled axe. Unless you develop a method to securely hold the coconut and you have perfect aim, an axe strike usually makes the coconut shoot to the side.

Immature coconut interiors are lined with an edible coconut jelly. I usually pass on that delicacy. Mature coconuts yield sweet flesh that is unmatched by sweetened, store bought products. I haven't found an easy way to separate the flesh from the shell. I use a knife with a stiff blade to score and pry off chunks of endosperm. If the coconut is older, you might find a swollen, edible embryo inside.

When I split a number of coconuts and have excess fruit, I leave the split coconuts out in the garden. Overnight, raccoons and other native animals feast on the flesh and leave me with cleaned-out husks. I cut these husks into smaller pieces and use them as orchid growing medium.



Auger bit, 6" diameter clear measuring cup, and fine mesh strainer



Drilled coconut draining water



Short handle hatchet and sledge



Split coconut ready to eat

Smoothie Recipe

- 2 store bought or 3 homegrown bananas (cut in half if frozen)
- 3 or more strawberries (optional)
- 2-3 heaping tablespoons of unsweetened Greek yogurt (coconut water is already sweet)
- Enough coconut water to provide the thickness you prefer
- 1-2 drops of vanilla (optional)
- If not using frozen fruit add a few ice cubes
- Blend until smooth